

VISN 16 — Six months After the Storm



Robert Lynch, M.D.
Network Director

It has been six months since Hurricane Katrina made landfall and as I reflect on just how far the Network has come in the healing and recovery process, I am truly amazed and honored to be a part of such a great agency.

Our response to this national emergency is considered among the things that “went right” in the overall federal response, according to the newly released *Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*. The 228-page document, released by the White House, outlines what the federal government could have done better, what it did do right, and improvements to be made for the future.

The report states, “The [VA] took a hard look at their resources, missions, assets, and personnel, and redirected them to fill the needs of the victims of the hurricane and flood, while maintaining service to America’s veterans.”

Employees and veterans can be proud of how we responded to this unprecedented tragedy. But, our fight to rebuild and recover isn’t over yet. In fact, the rebuilding has just begun.

The Gulfport campus, destroyed by the hurricane, had been slated to close in FY 2009 as part of the CARES decision with all services consolidated on the Biloxi campus via a major construction project. Post-Hurricane Katrina plans include the acceleration of the major construction project and the establishment of a temporary Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) on the Gulfport campus. In addition, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is using a section of the north Gulfport campus as a trailer park for displaced hurricane victims. VA employees who have lost their homes have priority for use of these trailers.

The major construction project on the Biloxi campus is currently in the design phase and we are currently undergoing partnership discussions with Keesler Air Force Base.

Interim projects include the acquisition of modular buildings for temporary administrative and storage space and the renovation of Building 19 for inpatient psychiatry.

For New Orleans, Public Law 109-148 authorized \$75,000,000 for advance planning and design for a replacement hospital. There is potential for a “shared services” model in partnership with Louisiana State University (LSU) and Tulane. On February 23, 2006,



Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is using a portion of the Gulfport campus, north of the railroad tracks, to house trailers for displaced hurricane victims. VA employees who have lost their homes have priority for use of these trailers.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Under Secretary for Health Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin (right) and Louisiana State University System President Dr. William Jenkins (left) signed a Memorandum of Understanding on February 23 agreeing to create a partnership that would bring state-of-the-art medical care to downtown New Orleans. The signing ceremony, hosted by Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco (at the podium), took place at the State Capitol in Baton Rouge.

VA and LSU signed an agreement to create a partnership that would bring state-of-the-art medical care to downtown New Orleans. The Memorandum of Understanding commits us to work with LSU in the rebuilding process.

The 10th floor of the Boggs Care Unit adjacent to the New Orleans Medical Center (above the parking garage) was opened as a primary care clinic in December. The 9th floor is slated to open with limited specialty care in late March. Mobile clinics operating in Hammond, LaPlace, and Slidell, LA are being replaced with CBOCs.

A special placement program has been initiated to permanently place displaced employees. About 80 percent of New Orleans employees have enrolled in the program.

The process of healing our lives and rebuilding our Network will take time, but six months in, I couldn’t be more proud of the strides we’ve made. I am confident we will continue to move forward to a better, brighter future, together.

VISN 16 Employees Honored for Heroism



Valor Award recipients traveled to Washington, D.C. to accept their awards from Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson. Nicholson honored 73 VA employees with the award which recognizes employees and citizens for heroic efforts displayed during a major catastrophe.

Dedication, selflessness and heroism took center stage in Washington recently as Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson recognized the efforts of 28 employees within VISN 16 during hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

VISN 16 employees receiving the Valor Award include:

Tony Allen, Little Rock, AR
Ronald Angel, Little Rock, AR
Russell Eilrich, Little Rock, AR
Mari Hughes, Little Rock, AR
Bradley Niell, Little Rock, AR
Holly Taylor, Little Rock, AR
Charles Deprey, VAMC Muskogee, OK
Rickey Lee, VAMC Muskogee, OK
Phil Boogaerts, VAMC New Orleans, LA
Alfred Cain, Jr., VAMC New Orleans, LA
William Donovan, VAMC New Orleans, LA
J. Rex Oxner, VAMC New Orleans, LA
Alfred Pratt, VAMC New Orleans, LA
Jerome Simon, VAMC New Orleans, LA
Alphonse Bourgeois, VAMC New Orleans, LA
Christopher Cahill, VAMC New Orleans, LA
Charlie J. Donelson, VAMC Jackson, MS
Reginald R. Finch, VAMC Jackson, MS
Ceagus Reed, VISN 16 Jackson, MS
R. Lynn Ryan, VISN 16 Jackson, MS
Samuel Myers, Jr., VAMC Biloxi, MS
James Ware, Jr., VAMC Biloxi, MS
Wayne B. Brown, VAMC Biloxi, MS
Scott Roy, VAMC Shreveport, LA
Tony Turner, VAMC Shreveport, LA
Lugene Brooks, VAMC Shreveport, LA
Annias Handy, VAMC Shreveport, LA
Donald Pickney, VAMC Shreveport, LA

The Secretary's Valor Award recognizes employees and citizens for heroic efforts displayed during a major catastrophe. The award is the highest level of recognition and is given to VA employees who exhibit courage and who put their lives in jeopardy to save others.

These employees were nominated because they exhibited great courage by voluntarily risking their personal safety to prevent the loss of human life or government property. As a result of their efforts, VA maintained continuity of care for several hundred acutely ill veterans under difficult conditions.

In total, 73 Valor Awards were given nationally, 3,000 other VA employees were recognized with official commendations and more than 6,800 were awarded certificates of appreciation for showing great initiative and ingenuity by addressing and solving all manner of problems arising from flooding, wind damage, lack of power, water, medical supplies and transport during hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Make a note...

- **An upcoming broadcast of VA News** will be hosted by two VISN 16 employees. Chris Alexander, public affairs officer, VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System, and Eileen Angelico, public affairs officer, New Orleans VA, are scheduled to anchor the news show that is scheduled to air on March 13th. The program will focus on the recovery efforts six months after the storm.
- **The current edition of VAngaurd** magazine includes two feature stories about life for VA employees after Hurricane Katrina.

About After the Storm

The *After the Storm* newsletter is a publication produced by the South Central VA Health Care Network in an effort to supply updated information to those affected by Hurricane Katrina as we continue to recover from this devastating storm.

This newsletter will be published on a recurring basis. For more information about the publication or to provide story ideas or information, call April Smith, writer/editor, VISN 16, at 601-364-7902.

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